

312 – The Ryūsen-ji Petition

Echigo-bō Nichiben and Shimotsuke-bō Nisshu, priests of Ryusen-ji in Fuji Shimokata in Suruga Province, state as follows.

The deputy chief priest of the said temple, Hei no Sakon Nydō Gyochi, hoping to conceal his own various offenses and keep them hidden, makes spurious and untruthful charges against us, charges that have no bases in fact. In the complaint he has brought, he states that Nisshū and Nichiben, calling themselves disciples of the priest Nichiren, claim that other sutras other than the Lotus Sutra and the practitioners of the True Word teachings are all ineffectual in bringing benefit either in one's present existence or in the existences to come. (This is the gist of the charge.)

Regarding this matter, the Sage Nichiren, the true teacher of Nisshū and Nichiben, observing the great comet and great earthquake¹ that had occurred since the beginning of the Shōka era, examined all the various sutras and came to this conclusion. Under present circumstances, Japan adheres to Hinayana or provisional sutras and fails to heed the true sutra. Therefore it will soon face two disasters that are like nothing known in previous times. These are the disaster of rebellion within the nation and the disaster of invasion by a foreign power.

Thinking of the welfare of the nation and of the need to take measures to deal with these two great disasters, in the Bunnō era he submitted a document in one scroll entitled *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land* to the authorities. All the things that he predicted in that document have come true. Like the predictions regarding the future made by the golden mouth of the Buddha, fulfilment has come as invariably as an echo follows a sound.

A non-Buddhist work states, “A sage is one who fully understands those things that have not yet made their appearance.”² And in the Buddhist writings it is said, “Wise men can perceive the cause of things, as snakes know the way of snakes.”³

In view of the situation, is it not clear that this teacher is a sage? And since this skilled leader is already present within the state, what need is there to seek such a treasure of the state abroad?

The non-Buddhist writings say, “When there is a sage in a neighbouring country, this is a matter of concern to its enemies.”⁴ In a Buddhist text we read, “Where there is a sage in the land, the heavenly gods will invariably lend their protection.”⁵ And in another non-Buddhist text it is stated, “In the world, where there is a sage and wise ruler, there will invariably be worth and enlightened ministers as well.”⁶

In the light of such passages, the fact that a sage is present in Japan should be a cause for great rejoicing in that country, and for great concern in the country of the Mongols. For the sage will dispatch his dragons to drown the enemy ships in the sea. He will call upon Brahma and Shakra to capture the Mongol ruler!

Since the ruler of Japan is a worthy man, why does he not make use of this sage, instead of ineffectually worrying about the threat of a foreign power?

Shakyamuni Buddha, the World-Honoured One of Great Enlightenment, foreseeing

the inevitable era of conflict that would occur in the Latter Day of the Law,⁷ described and left behind a secret technique for dealing with great disasters that would be face then. This is made perfectly clear in the sutra passages.⁸

However, during the more than 2,220 years after the passing of the Thus Come One, this secret was not yet propagated in India, China, Japan or any of the other countries of the continent of Jambudvīpa. Thus the four ranks of bodhisattvas, though they understood it in their minds, did not expound it. T'ien-t'ai and Dengyo likewise did not discourse it, for they knew that the time to do so had not yet come.

The Lotus Sutra states, "In the last five-hundred-year period you must spread it abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa."⁹ The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai said, "In the last five-hundred-year period [the mystic way will spread and benefit humankind far into the future.]"¹⁰ Miao-lo said, "The fifth five hundred years..."¹¹ And the Great Teacher Dengyo said: "Speaking of the age, [the propagation of the true teaching will begin] in the age when the Middle Day of the Law ends and the Latter Day opens. Regarding the land, it will begin in a land to the east of T'ang and to the west of Katsu. As for the people, it will spread among people stained by the five impurities who live in a time of conflict."¹² This passage clearly indicates that the east will be victorious and the west will suffer defeat.

This sage, the lord of the Law, understands the time, understands the country, understands the teaching, and understands the people's capacity. For the sake of the ruler, for the sake of the people, for the sake of the gods, and for the sake of the Buddhas, he has pondered and set forth the steps to be taken in dealing with these calamities and disasters.

Not only is his advice not heeded, however, but in addition, because of the invidious words of persons who would slander the Law, the sage has suffered an injury to his head, his left hand has been broken twice,¹³ and he has twice been condemned to exile in a distant region. His disciples in many different places have been shot to death with arrows, cut down with swords, killed otherwise, wounded with swords, imprisoned, exiled, beaten, expelled, or subjected to abuse in severe persecutions too numerous to describe.

Because of these actions, the entire nation of Japan has made itself the archenemy of the Lotus Sutra, and its myriad inhabitants have all become persons of incorrigible disbelief. And as a result the heavenly deities have abandoned the nation, the earthly deities have taken their leave, and there is no longer any peace in the realm.

This is the state of affairs as it has been conveyed to us. And though we are lacking in ability, we offer this petition, unworthy as it may be, for consideration. A non-Buddhist text says, "If evil persons are present at court, the worthy cannot advance."¹⁴ And a Buddhist work states, "If even a good monk sees someone destroying the teaching and fails to reproach him,...then that monk is betraying the Buddha's teaching."¹⁵

Rumour has it that the government authorities have summoned eminent priests and directed them to conduct prayers for the defeat of the forces of the Mongol state. But an examination of the records reveals that in the Genryaku era [of Emperor Antoku] and the Jōkyū era [of the Retired Emperor Gotoba] the chief priests of Mount Hiei, the

prelate of To-ji,¹⁶ the supervisors and chief officials of the seven major temples of Nara and Onjō-ji, along with various True Word priests, were summoned to the imperial court and in Shishin-den Palace conducted imprecations directed at the late Minamoto no Yorimoto, General of the Right, and the late Hōjō Yasutoki.

Conducting ceremonies of this kind will, if the participants do so for their own sake, bring about their demise, and if they are intended for more forceful aims, they will assuredly cause the downfall of the ruler as well. Hence it was the Emperor Antoku sank beneath the waters of the western sea; Myōun, the chief priest of Mount Hiei, was stuck and killed by a stray arrow; the Retired Emperor Gotoba was exiled and abandoned on a barbarian island;¹⁷ the prelate of Tō-ji died on Mount Koya,¹⁸ and another chief priest of mount Hiei¹⁹ suffered the shame of being driven out of office. The penalties resulting from such ceremonies appeared before people's very eyes, worthy men of later times were filled with fear, and the safe of whom we have spoken grieves over these events in his mountain retreat.

Next we would like to speak regarding assertions that one should carry out devotions to the Amida Sutra at certain fixed times. Considering the matter, we see that blossoms and the moon are admired, water or fire is used at times when such actions are appropriate; their use does not abide by previously fixed rules. And the same applies to the various Buddhist doctrines; they are adopted or laid aside depending upon what is appropriate to the time.

Moreover, the Amida Sutra,²⁰ the four-sheet text that you adhere to, is only a minor sutra preached in the period about which the Buddha said, "In these more than forty years I have not yet revealed the truth."²¹ The Venerable Shariputra, known as the wisest person in the continent of Jambudvīpa, read and recited this sutra over a period of many years, but in the end was never able to attain Buddhahood. Later, however, he discarded this sutra, and eventually, when the Lotus Sutra was preached, was told that he would become a Buddha names Flower Glow Thus Come One. How, then, could ignorant persons living in this evil age of the Latter Day hope, simply by reciting the invocation Namu Amida Butsu, to be reborn in the Pure Land in their next existence?

Therefore the Buddha was warning us when he said in the Lotus Sutra, "Honestly discarding expedient means, I will preach only the unsurpassed way."²² Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, is in effect saying that he has discarded the Amida Sutra.

Again, the Nirvana Sutra states: "Thought the Thus Come One does not speak untruths, if I knew that by speaking falsely [I could help the living beings gain the benefits of the Law, then for their sake I would go along with what is best and speak such words as an expedient means]" This passage is saying in effect that recitation of the name of Amida Buddha is an empty practice.

The Lotus Sutra states: "desiring only to accept and embrace the sutra of the great vehicle and not accepting a singly verse of other sutras."²³ The Great Teacher Miao-lo says, "Moreover, the Flower Garland Sutra [contains a passage similar to that of the Lotus Sutra on the six difficult and nine easy acts, but] it is a series of comparisons of the blessings to be received and not in terms of the teaching to be propagated, as set forth in the Lotus Sutra. Therefore the Lotus Sutra says, 'not accepting a single verse of the other sutras.'²⁴

The Flower Garland Sutra was preached at the place where the Buddha achieved enlightenment and expounds the doctrine that the phenomenal world is the creation of the mind alone.²⁵ The superior text contains as many chapters as the dust particles of ten major world systems. The middle grade contains 498,000 verses. The inferior text contains 100,000 verses in 48 chapters.²⁶ But if we examine the extant editions of the complete collection of sutras, we see that there are only an eighty-volume version, a sixty-volume version, and a forty-volume version of this sutra.

In addition, there are various other exoteric and esoteric Mahayana sutras such as the Correct and Equal sutras, the Wisdom sutras, the Mahavairochana Sutra, and the Diamond Crown Sutra. But when we compare them with the Lotus Sutra, we see that the Buddha himself has said that they were preached when he had “not yet revealed the truth,” and that they represent a path “beset by numerous hindrances and trials.”²⁷

Therefore we should close the door on them, should abandon them.²⁸ And how much more should we do so in the case of the Amida Sutra! To compare it to the Lotus Sutra is like putting an ant hill beside a great mountain and asking which is higher, or pitting a fox or a rabbit against a lion and asking which is stronger!

We, Nisshū and the others of our group, have now abandoned these lesser sutras and read and recite only the Lotus Sutra, recommending this practice to all the world and chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Are we not expressing fervent loyalty in doing so?

If there are any details relating to this matter that remain unclear, we request that the authorities summon various eminent Buddhist priests so that we may debate with them and settle the rights and wrongs of the affair. This was the practice followed earlier in India, China, and Japan in determining what is superior and what is inferior in matters relating to the Buddhist teachings. Now, when we live in an age of enlightened government, should this time-honored practice of these three nations be discarded?

In his complaint, Gyōchi states that on the twenty-first day of the present month a band formed of a number of persons armed with bows and arrows broke into the compound of the chief priest, and that Shimotsuke-bō Nisshū, armed and mounted on a horse, along with a peasant of Atsuhara named Kijirō, set up a notice board and the group then reaped the rice crop and carried it off to the compound occupied by Nisshū. (This is the gist of the charge.)

These allegations are completely false and without substance. Nisshū and the others had been driven out of their living quarters by Gyochi and had no place to go, so who would give credence to a notice board they had posted? And why would the local peasants, who are weak and powerless, agree to do their bidding? If, as the complaint asserts, Nisshū and the others had armed themselves with bows and arrows and were planning some evil action, why did Gyochi and others in the vicinity not disarm them, bring them before the authorities and report the details of the matter? These allegations are wholly fallacious, and we ask that they be examined in a just and impartial manner.

Nisshū and Nichiben have for a number of years been resident priests of Ryusen-ji, the temple in question, and have carried out their Buddhist practice in earnest, offering prayers for the longevity of the sovereign and the safety of the land. But Gyochi, while

acting as deputy chief priest of the sacred precincts of the said temple, addressed certain priests of the temple, namely, Mikawa-bō, Raien,²⁹ Shō-bō Nichizen, Nisshū, and Nichiben, insisting that the doctrines of the Lotus Sutra are not trustworthy and ordering them to cease at once reading and reciting the Lotus Sutra and to devote all their attention to reading of the Amida Sutra and recitation of the Nembutsu. He stated that if they would prepare a written pledge to this effect, he would insure them of a place to live.

When these orders were received, Raien, obeying them, wrote out his pledge and was allowed to remain in his quarters. But Nichizen and the others, because they did not present a written pledge, were deprived of their position as priests of the quarters they occupied. Nichizen then left the temple entirely. Nisshū and Nichiben, because they have no other place to go, have continued to reside in the temple as they have in the past.

During the past four years, however, Nisshū and the others have not only been deprived of their position as priests of their respective quarters, but have been forbidden to carry out important prayer ceremonies. And as though that were not an evil action enough, steps have been taken to strip them of their role as coterie of the Lotus Sutra, they have been schemed against in other ways, and untruths of various kinds have been circulated about them. One would suppose that Devadatta, who lived in the time of the Buddha, were still alive today!

In general, these are the sort of actions carried out by Gyochi. He had Izumi-bō Renkai, the priest who officiates in the Lotus Meditation Hall, take the copy of the Lotus Sutra, tan the paper in persimmon juice, carve it up into fixed shapes, and use it to repair the halls and smaller building. Nichiben had been obeying a written order instructing him to set aside eight thousand inches of the twelve thousand inches of upper roofing, but Gyochi used it for his personal needs. Gyochi incited the official in charge of the Shimokata administration office to attack Shirō, a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra, with a knife and wound him at the time of the religious rites in the fourth month.³⁰ And in the eighth month he had the head of Yashiro cut off, spreading word around that this was the work of Nisshū and the others.³¹

After extracting fines from a witless and talentless thief named Hyōbu-bō Join,³² he announced that Join was a man of outstanding ability and appointed him as an officiating priest. In addition, he employed a number of peasants attached to the temple to catch quail, hunt raccoon dogs, and slay a deer that had been caught in a boar trap, and then had these served up as food in the quarters of the superintendent, the chief priest. He also had poison placed in the pond in front of the Buddhist halls, killing a certain number of fish thereby and then dispatching them for sale in the nearby village.

Of the people who observed or heard of these actions, there were none whose eyes and ears were not alarmed, so great was their grief at these flagrant violations of the Buddhist teachings.

As evil and unworthy actions such as these on the part of Gyochi continued to pile up day after day, Nisshū and the others, distressed in the extreme, sought to inform the authorities of the matter. But Gyōchi, anxious to hide his various offenses, resorted to a variety of secret schemes, enlisting the aid of his associates, circulating false rumors

that have no basis in fact and attempting to bring about the ruin of Nisshū and the others. The situation is so grave that it defies description. In the light of both the religious and the secular law, some form of remonstrance seems surely to be required, does it not?

To sum up, if careful investigation is made into the provisional and the true teachings in terms of the Buddhist teachings and into the truth or falsity of the charges that are being brought, the entire enquiry conducted in accordance with the golden words of the Buddha and the provisions clearly set forth in the legal codes,³³ and appropriate measures are taken to prevent further abuse, then the benevolent deities who protect the nation will cease their unusual behaviour and the heavenly gods who guard the correct teaching will smile once again. Gyochi, the deputy chief priest of Ryusen-ji, who carries out these evil and unworthy actions, must be dismissed. If not, then it is doubtful that the chief priest of the said temple can escape grave censure as a result. One should keep in mind that the example of Ryusen-ji is different from what happened earlier at Jisso-ji.³⁴

We request, therefore, that the affair be settled in accordance with unquestionable principles of justice and that Nisshū and Nichiben be allowed to occupy their assigned quarters, to repair the halls and other temple buildings and to devote themselves wholeheartedly to their duty as loyal subjects, offering prayers for the longevity of the sovereign and the safety of the land. With this aim in mind, we respectfully submit this petition for the consideration of the authorities.

The tenth month in the second year of Kōan [1279]

Presented by the shramanas Nisshū and Nichiben

Background

This petition from the priests Nisshū and Nichiben was submitted to the legal court of the Kamakura government in the tenth month of 1279.

Nichiren Daishonin reviewed a draft of the petition written by Nikko and revised it, substantially adding to the first part. The first half refers to matters of doctrine and the latter to details of fact.

This petition was written during the Atsuhara Persecution. The Atsuhara Persecution refers to a series of oppressive acts and threats against the followers of the Daishonin in Atsuhara Village in the Fuji District, Suruga Province, that spanned nearly three years and culminated in the execution of three believers on the fifteenth day of the tenth month in 1279 (on the eighth day of the fourth month in 1280 by another account).

Around 1275, after the Daishonin had taken up residence at Minobu, propagation of his teachings began to progress substantially in the Fuji area under Nikko's leadership. At Ryusen-ji, a temple of the Tendai school in Atsuhara, Nikko converted several of the younger priests – including Shimotsuke-bō, Echigo-bō, and Shō-bō – who became the Daishonin's disciples and took the names Nisshū, Nichiben and Nichizen

respectively. And these priests converted a number of local farmers. Alarmed at the defection of the priests and lay supporters, Gyochi, a lay priest and a member of the ruling Hojo clan who acted as the deputy chief priest of the temple, used his connections with the authorities to suppress their activities and expel the converted priests from the temple. Hence the Daishonin oversaw the completion of the petition to be submitted by Nisshū and Nichiben.

The text addresses the complain Gyochi has filed against them, countering his false charges. The complaint raises two major points and the text of the petition can be divided into two parts accordingly.

The first part refers to the fact that the two calamities – revolt within one’s own domain and invasion from foreign lands – which the Daishonin had prophesized in his 1260 treatise *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land*, have in fact come to pass, and assesses that the Daishonin should be regarded as a sage to whom the leadership should turn for the means to protect the nation. Then it points out the futility of True Word prayers conducted for the defeat of Mongol forces, citing precedents from history. This part ends with the refutation of the provisional sutras, in particular the Amida Sutra.

The latter portion of the petition seeks to expose the falsehood of the charges lodged by Gyochi that a number of armed person broke into his compound, reaped the rice crop, and carried it off to the compound occupied by Nisshū. In addition, it cites specific examples of Gyōchi’s unpriestly and criminal behaviour such as instigating murder and hunting. Lastly, it calls on the authorities to make careful investigation of the charges in accordance with the Buddha’s teachings and the legal codes, and to dismiss Gyochi from his position and allow Nisshū and Nichiben to occupy their assigned quarters. Such just actions in support of the practitioners of the correct teaching, it says, will bring about peace and security to the country.

Notes

1. A reference to the huge comet that appeared in the seventh month of 1264 and the great earthquake that devastated the Kamakura area in the eighth month of 1257.
2. Exact source unknown, though statements of this kind are found often in works of early Chinese literature.
3. *The Annotations o “The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra.”*
4. Source unknown
5. Source unknown, but chapter fourteen of the Lotus Sutra says, “The heavenly beings day and night will for the sake of the Law constantly guard and protect them [the votaries of the sutra].”
6. Source unknown.
7. This refers to “the age of quarrels and disputes,” the last of the five five-hundred-year periods following Shakyamuni’s death, which are described in the Great Collections Sutra. It corresponds to the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law. In the sutra, Shakyamuni says that in the last five hundred years quarrels and disputes will arise among the followers of his teachings, and that the pure Law will be obscured and lost.
8. The “sutra” here I the Lotus Sutra. For example, chapter five says, “Once these living beings have heard the Law, they will enjoy peace and security in their

- present existence and good circumstances in future existences” and chapter twenty-six says, “I will also shield and guard those who uphold this sutra, making certain that they suffer no decline or harm within the area of a hundred yojanas.”
9. Lotus Sutra, chap.23.
 10. *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*
 11. On “*The Words and Phrases.*”
 12. *The Outstanding Principles of the Lotus Sutra.* T’ang refers to China, and Katsu to a Tungusic nation that ruled over northeastern China and northern Korea in the sixth and seventh centuries. “A land to the east of T’ang and to the west of Katsu” indicates Japan according to old maps.
 13. This refers to the Komatsuba Persecution of 1264, when the Daishonin and his party were attacked by the steward Tōjō Kagenobu. In the ensuing fight, among his followers, Kyōnin-bō was killed, and Kudō Yoshitaka died of the wounds he suffered. The next sentence refers to the Izu Exile from 1261 to 1263, and the Sado exile from 1271 through 1274.
 14. Source unknown.
 15. A summary of a passage in the Nirvana Sutra.
 16. The prelate of Tō-ji most probably refers to the prelate of Omuro (Ninna-ji temple in Kyoto), Prince Dōjo, who was the central figure in conducting True Word prayers for the defeat of Kamakura during the Jōkyū Disturbance in 1221. The original of this text can read either “the prelate [of] Tō-ji” or “the prelate [and] Tō-ji,” but the original of another writing of the Daishonin includes his expression “the chief priest of Mount Hiei and the prelate of Tō-ji.” The translators have adopted this interpretation. The Daishonin referred to Prince Dōjo as the prelate of Tō-ji probably in the sense that Tō-ji represents the True Word school or that the prelate of Omuro virtually dominated Tō-ji as well.
 17. Antoku, still a child at the time, drowned in 1185 during a sea battle at Dannoura, where the Taira met their final defeat at the hands of the Minamoto. Myōun was respectively the fifty-fifth and fifty-seventh chief priest of Enryaku-ji, the head temple of the Tendai school, on Mount Hiei. When Myōun visited the Retired Emperor Goshirakawa at his palace in 1183, it was attacked by forces led by Minamoto no Yoshinaka, a general of the Minamoto clan, and he was stuck and killed by a stray arrow. In 1221, the Retired Emperor Gotoba, together with the reigning emperor and the two retired emperors, attempted to overthrow the military government in Kamakura, but his forces were defeated by those of the Kamakura regent Hōjō Yoshitoki, under the leadership of his eldest son, Yasutoki. Gotoba was exiled to the island of Oki in the Sea of Japan.
 18. That “the prelate of Tō-ji,” Prince Dōjo, died on Mount Kōya is described in *The Biographies of Eminent Priests in Japan.*
 19. This refers to Sonkai, the seventy-third chief priest of Enryaku-ji temple on Mount Hiei. He was a son of the Retired Emperor Gotoba. He was driven out of office in 1221.
 20. The one-volume Amida Sutra consisted of only four sheets.
 21. Immeasurable Meanings Sutra.
 22. Lotus Sutra, chap.2.
 23. Ibid., chap.3.
 24. *The Treatise of Five Hundred Questions*
 25. This statement is based on a passage in the Flower Garland Sutra that says:

- “The mind is like a skilled painter, who creates various forms made up of the five components. Thus of all the phenomena throughout the entire world, there is not a single one that is not created by the mind.”
26. This refers to the three versions of the Flower Garland Sutra said to be kept at the dragon palace, and which are mentioned in *The Annotations on “The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra.”* Concerning the middle text, however, the commentary says, “The middle grade text contains 498,800 verses.”
 27. Immeasurable Meanings Sutra. It says, “Thought immeasurable, boundless, inconceivable asamkhya kalpas may pass, they [living beings] will in the end fail to gain unsurpassed enlightenment. Why? Because they will not know about the great direct way to enlightenment, but will travel perilous byways beset by numerous hindrances and trials.”
 28. A rephrasing of Hōnen’s statement in *The Nembutsu Chosen Above All*. He asserted that one should discard, close, ignore, and abandon all teachings and practices other than those relating to Amida Buddha.
 29. Virtually nothing is known about Raien other than that he was a resident priest of Ryūsen-ji.
 30. “Religious rites” refers to an archery contest held at Omiya Sengen Shrine on the eighth day of the fourth month, 1279. Shirō and Yashirō, who appear in the next sentence, were believers of the Daishonin’s teachings and farmers of Atsuhara in the Fuji area.
 31. In the revised draft, the Daishonin comments that Nisshū and Nichiben should put this phrase in the text, but in this translation it is inserted as he directed.
 32. Nothing is known about Jōin other than that he was a priest of Ryūsen-ji.
 33. “Legal codes” refers to *The Formulary of Adjudications*, which was regarded as a symbol of fair and equitable law by the society of the time. Formulated in 1232, it was the first codification of law established by the Kamakura shogunate.
 34. Jissō-ji was a Tendai temple at Iwamoto in Fuji. The third and fourth chief priests of the temple lapsed into a pattern of wanton misconduct. In 1268, Nikkō, who was a resident priest there, filed a complaint against them with the Kamakura government. In the case of Jissō-ji, its chief priest had no connection with the ruling Hōjō clan, but Gyōchi, the deputy chief priest of Ryūsen-ji, was a member of the ruling clan. He therefore was more likely to gain personal favors from the Kamakura government.